

Writing Your Narrative from Start to Finish

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So you have an idea...

Ideation

- Write down **everything** you can possibly think of. These notes are just for you - don't worry if they don't make sense to anyone else on the planet.
- Clearly identify who your story is about. What/who is opposing them?
- Keep a dream journal for practice. See if you can shape the concept of your dream into a story from start to finish. Take thorough notes about your thoughts and ideas.
- Read non fiction. Neil Gaiman cites this as one of his best brainstorming tools! Write down everything that sounds like something you can use later.

Ready to get started?

The Summary + The Wishlist

- Write a short summary of your novel or idea - explain it like you're reading the back of the book for the first time.
- Make an unordered list of everything you can think of that you want to put in your story! Just write them down as you think of them.
- Try to think about the media that influenced your idea - books, movies, comics, music. Take some time to go over them again and refresh your memory.

The Timeline

- Put the events you know so far in order. Use numbers or bullet points for each point. Fill in any gaps as best you can.
- Keep your description of each event as simple as possible. Try to keep it to 1-2 sentences maximum.
- Try to keep the whole timeline to one page.

- Circle and be mindful of the places where you feel your ideas aren't as clear. These sections will be the most at risk for writer's block and getting stuck. If you don't have answers, at least write down your questions and come back to them frequently to keep them at the front of your mind.

Create a Bible

Writers for television shows usually use “bibles” that document the details of the project they're working on. For your own writing projects, a bible is a way to keep your notes organized and easy to reference. Things that you might include in your own bible might be:

- A list of characters with a brief description of their appearance and personality.
- A list of locations and their significance to the story.
- A description of ways that your narrative may differ from reality. How does your magic system work?
- World building details.

Not sure if your bible is complete or even any good? If someone wanted to write a brand new story about your characters and set in your world, does your bible tell them everything they need to know to do that? Keep adding to it if it doesn't.

The Outline

- Imagine the finished novel in your head. How would you describe it to someone who hasn't read it yet? That's your outline.
- Describe things with as much detail as you can think of. If you have a lot of ideas, always write them down so you don't have to try to remember them as you're writing.
- Try to force yourself not to skip anything, especially unclear sections.
- If possible, try to make the outline so thorough that if someone else had to write this story for you, they should be able to do so by following your outline.

Start writing!

Good Habits

- Always attempt to prioritize consistency. As much as you can, write during the same time, in the same place. Make this a ritual and respect it.
- Turn off the WiFi and put your phone out of reach. If you need to look something up, mark that spot in your writing with a place holder like [LOCATION]. Fill these details in later outside of your writing time.
- Think like a storyteller presenting in front of an audience. Prioritize telling the story instead of obsessing over how each sentence is worded.
- If you have to stop and think about the logistics more than you are actually writing, go back to your outline and bible. There are probably some gaps to fill in.
- It's okay to skip sections sometimes and come back to them later, but writing out of order can interrupt the overall flow of your story and make editing more of a challenge. Try to do this sparingly.
- Some days will always go better than others. Stick to your ritual even on days when you don't feel like it. It's easier to go back set aside content you don't like

Losing steam?

Writer's Block

"I don't know what to write next..."

- Often happens when you reach gaps in your outline. Try to go fill those in first rather than trying to directly write the part your stuck on.
- Write it anyway. It's usually there, even if you don't like it. Fix it after your first draft is done and you have a bird's eye view of the whole thing.

Rekindle Your Inspiration

"I don't feel like writing this narrative right now..."

- Go back to your wish list. Watch, listen, read, study the things that inspired you to create this story in the first place.
- You might need a break. Just put a return date on your calendar and stick with it.

Get a Second Opinion

"I don't know if it's any good..."

- Join a writing community. Try forums, Discord, fanfiction, nanowrimo.org.
- Other authors are often willing to exchange feedback. (Always give the kind of feedback you want to receive.)
- Ask for others to critique smaller sections, such as a single chapter or a few pages. If your reader wants more, they'll ask you for it!
- Try to get feedback from a person you respect. It will be intrinsically more credible and motivating to you personally than empty praise from a non writer friend or supportive family member.